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ABSTRACT

Claremont College's efforts to explore the subject of Black Studies in a systematic fashion may be the first step in the direction of its own "re-humanization." The relevance of this statement may be seen in the light of the ease with a large number of white institutions of higher education have dodged the intellectual issue -- by setting up separate Black Studies programs without a single step toward adjusting their core curricula. Fresh thought should be characterized by a pluralistic approach to curriculum development and management, and institutional governance. Before Black Studies can earn the status of an academic discipline, white institutions must recognize their inability to so accredit them. They need to, among others mentioned earlier, replace "scientific colonialism" with "scietific humanism," and develop a systematic and transmittable body of knowledge about the black condition before being in a position to institute Black Stuides as an academic discipline. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of the original document.] (RJ)

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BLACK STUDIES AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

Toward a Definition
(Revised Edition)

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African American Education*

Dedicated to

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If we react to white racism with a violent reaction, to me that is not Black racism! If you came to put a rope around my neck and I hang you for it, to me that's not racism. My reaction is the reaction of a human being, reacting to defend himself and protect himself.

Malcolm X at
Harvard Law School Forum
December 16, 1964

Introduction

Claremont College is to be commended for convening a conference on the subject issue: Black Studies as an Academic Discipline. Considering the amount of ivory tower energy that has been invested in proving that the only way Black Students can achieve is to deny any association with their own cultural heritage--and the historical inequities designed to destroy it--this is an important step in the right direction. Claremont College's efforts to explore this subject in a systematic fashion may be the first step in the direction of its own re-humanization.

This observation is made because of the ease with which a large number of white-controlled institutions of higher education have dodged the intellectual issue. They did so by setting up separate and sometimes autonomously-controlled Black Studies programs without taking one step to de-colonize their core curricula. The organized resistance to courses such as Swahili is a case in point. Not only were efforts undertaken to invalidate Swahili as being worthy of location within an academic curriculum, several mainstream scholars challenged its relevance to the descendants of Africa. All this took place in the shadow of "Freshman Orientation" courses which function mainly to acclimate students to the campus but not necessarily to education for a meaningful survival, liberation and contribution.

But, one can not permit himself to be carried away by the opportunity to explore this question. Recall that the concept of "academic discipline" as perceived by most scholars does not include authentic Blacks as full participants--nor does it seek to define them as equals. It is a creation of a white supremacist society; one in which scientific colonialism was utilized both to conceal the reality of racism

and to label Black scholars as being "unqualified." The criteria by which most white Americans have earned their Ph.D.'s has had little to do with white merit. It has had more to do with white oppression. White scholars have had to compete with Black scholars as students or as co-definers of the social fabric of this society.

I call this phenomena the "Satchel Paige Syndrome". Satchel Paige's expertise as a baseball pitcher increased the possibility that he would not be admitted to the major leagues until he was thought to be over the hill. This reminds me of a white friend who was the Florida State champion in the 100 yard dash while in high school. He graduated the same year as did Bob Hayes, now of the Dallas Cowboys. Bob Hayes may not have the trophy in his home--since he was prevented by the white segregationists from competing--but everybody in Florida knows who the real champion is.

A correlary to this analysis is the content and style of the "academic format" shaped deliberately to include and deepen white control over Blacks and to exclude authentic Black inputs. Such an academic concept can only be fully understood as being politically and intellectually oppressive, colonialistic in action, and white supremacist in content. The Ph.D.-ing process, which is similar to that of the making of a priest, often requires that candidates surrender the right to think for themselves to the doctoral committee --in the same way that a candidate for ordination takes a vow to the Pope.

The political nature of "academic disciplines" as applied by mainstream scholars raises a further question. The so-called "apolitical stance" of mainstream scholars is in fact a fabrication. Such a policy merely conceals the politics behind it under a facade of scientific objectivity.

To apply the same criteria to Black Studies as has been applied to white studies is to ensure that Black Studies will become white studies.

A New Social Contract

That Claremont College has raised this issue to the level of intellectual inquiry is a commendable effort only to the degree that such an inquiry respects certain basic understanding about the issue being engaged:

a) White-controlled institutions of higher education have survived as full members of a society in which it is "illegal" to be human: herewith defined as being one who is capable of establishing a positive relationship with one of minority group status, a poor person, or one who is different from oneself.

b) White-controlled institutions of higher education have survived not as instruments to re-shape society but as tools of the same society that has assigned "illegal" status to the groups mentioned above.

c) The thrust of Black Studies Programs must remain at the level of a movement. (1) They must resist institutionalization and any partnership which is not pluralistic, humanistic in function, and integrally related to the liberation and restoration of all Black people. More than anything else, Black Studies Programs must be viewed as instruments for the development of the Black community. They should not be permitted to become token instruments for the legitimation of white institutions of higher education.

d) The scientific colonialism--defined by Galtung as "that process whereby the center of gravity for the acquisition of knowledge about a nation is located outside itself"--must be replaced by scientific humanism wherein the center of gravity for the acquisition of knowledge about Black people is collected, controlled, managed and distributed by Black people.[2]

Before this issue,then, can be systematically approached a social contract must be made between:

a) The powers - that - be in the white controlled institutions must get involved in overcoming the racist practices that benefit them in economic and educational terms to the disadvantage of Black and other minority group students.

Recall that most such institutions are organized as though we reside in an egalitarian society when, in fact, the democracy

they espouse is a hypocrisy. Blacks are not treated as equals by whites because the essential meaning of being white is to be non-Black - in style, habits, behavior, etc. Part of being white is to define Blacks as being inferior; an active manifestation of white superiority.

Stokely Carmichael raised this question for whites when he wrote:

> It must be offered that white people who desire change in this country should go where that problem (racism) is most manifest; the problem is not in the Black community. The whites should go into white communities where whites have created power for the express purpose of denying Blacks human dignity and self-determination.[3]

b) <u>The Black Studies Institute must be involved systematically in redefining, understanding and codifying the Black experience to ensure that a body of relevant and transmittable knowledge is developed</u>.

This effort must involve the development of new definitions of old perspectives, an increasing reliance on Black self-accreditation and the planful use of instinctual understandings - such as self-concept, functional anger and the like. The old perspectives have assigned inhuman status to Blacks. The efforts of Blacks to integrate with whites has lead to a new level of white paternalism: whites keep the real power; Blacks become acting colonial relations agents. Traditional Ivory Tower intellectualism is, in fact, a higher form of anti-intellectualism: it isolates theory from practice; separates apprehension from comprehension; thought from action; and conceals the politics of social control behind a facade of "apolitical intellectuality."

This new social contract should be characterized by a <u>pluralistic approach</u> to curriculum development and management and institutional governance. The white segment of the institution should be involved

in getting its house in order while the Black segment does likewise. The interface between these two should involve a continuing identification of shared curriculum and decision-making responsibilities and opportunities in order to increase the possibility that a legitimate integrated institution will result.

A white-controlled institution can never achieve the status of authentic integration. Neither can a predominantly white institution acheive that status. Such a status can only be achieved within a racist society if the student body is predominantly minority group and the control in the least is multi-racial with clear divisions of labor and responsibility.[4]

Significantly the meaning of education and the educational goals of the university system should undergo a process of re-ordering. Student orientation should engage students in beginning to learn-how-to-learn about that particular contribution which they want to make toward the betterment of the society of which they are a part. The traditional plan orients students into participant-consumer roles into the system rather than as participant-producers. A second order of business is that of enabling students to learn-how-to-think for themselves rather than the way we would like to have them think. Part and parcel of the process is that of enabling students to begin to view education as a tool for their own liberation; as a political instrument, if you will, and not merely a means to make it.

This new social contract then should be based on:

a) an identification of a <u>shared responsibility</u> - Black and white - in defining the role of an educational institution within a democratic society (and how to achieve such a society).

b) an identification of those decisions which are the exclusive purview of the participating partners as they relate to the various components - admissions criteria, course requirements, faculty status, curriculum content, etc. - of the university system.

This new social contract will foster a different set of social relationships between the participating partners. Rather than competing with each other to define and re-define the white and Black positions, each will be assigned to defining a human position in his own terms. Rather than competing with and confronting each other, they will find themselves competing with and confronting themselves: the first rung on the road to meaningful self-education. Whites will not have to feel like patrons: Blacks will not have to feel patronized. Importantly, white administrators will not have to learn how to make relevant decisions about Blacks. Instead, they will be called upon to give up their need to do so. Blacks, in turn, will not have to expend decision-making energies teaching whites to understand and accredit the Black experience. These energies can be better utilized deepening its implementation.

The rationale for proposing such a social contract is based on the following:

a) Among the many consequences of the racist society in which we reside is not only its impact on the Black-white encounter but its impact on how people feel about themselves, others and their frames of reference. White unity is a factor, then of the common negative attitudes toward Blacks. Whites perceive each other positively largely because of their common disdain for Black people and not because of a positive identity with whom they are. To make a humane decision affecting Black people is anti-white in the view of most white people.

   Black "unity" thus far has derived from common oppression and exploitation and less from a development of positive group self-interests. This pattern is gradually being reversed by the Black power ethos. Black people are relying less and less on a humane response from whites. They are utilizing their skills and resources to increase the degree to which they control and define their own lives.

b) As most institutions of higher education have operated, they have systematically overlooked the legitimate concerns of Black people, the communities in which they reside and their legitimate aspirations. Black students, until very recently, were significantly absent on most such campuses. As a consequence, large numbers of students have been educated not to be able to perceive and deal with Black people and their experiences on a humane level. Not only is there a "missing" body of knowledge, effective ways and means of collecting, interpreting and understanding it have yet to be developed.

III. TOWARD A DEFINITION

Before Black Studies can earn the status of an academic discipline, white-controlled institutions must recognize their inability to so accredit them. Black Studies should not become a replica of white studies - nor should they be perceived as being a reaction to the failure of institutions of higher education to include such programs as an integral part of their curricula.

The thrust for Black Studies Programs developed not on white college campuses but at Selma, Birmingham and at the March on Washington. It was on the civil right battlefield that Blacks learned that an appeal to the white conscience had to be replaced by an appeal to Black consciousness; that the alternative to white oppression was not integration but the mounting of Black power; that white people could not save Black people from exploitation and degradation as long as white people benefitted from them.

In order to fully understand this movement one must understand Jim Forman's Black Manifesto as an attempt to define a new socio-economic contract between white donors and Black recipients.[5] It is based, not on white philanthropy but Black restitution. Grants made to Black students should be perceived not as white charity but as the return of "legal entitlements" to a group on whose backs this nation was built. The concept of reparations must be fully understood

as a prerequisite, then, to understanding the subject at hand. Black Studies can not be perceived as an "academic discipline" as long as the program resources are white-controlled and/or managed.

James Boggs has discussed the subject of Black Capitalism as being mythical and irrational.[6] He has raised the question in order to warn Blacks against displacing whites as economic exploiters of Blacks and as a means to urge them to develop a new set of socio-economic relationships - non-exploitative in nature and collectively income-producing in operation. His point seems to be that racism and capitalism are so deeply intertwined that they shape and are shaped by each other. This behavior on college campuses is seen in the pattern of utilizing federal grants and special programs as a way to increase the inventory of Black students. Whites continue to get paid to serve as gatekeepers for the one-by-one admission of Black students on criteria established by whites and not Blacks. As Forman has put it:

> ...we have always resisted attempts to make us slaves and now we must resist attempts to make us capitalists.[7]

The reparations concept based on the articulation of a humanizing socio-economic contract between white donors and Black recipients and the recognition of a need to develop a humanizing socio-economic network of relationships within the Black community are important to understand. This external-internal relationship construct became the basis on which the National Association for African-American Education began to develop an educational paradigm addressed to an understanding of the Black condition. It began by defining the Black educator as follows:

> students, parents, community, leaders, clergymen, businessmen, activists, moderates, college professors, teachers, educational administrators and all who are actively involved in the educational liberation and survival of the Black People.[8]

It attempts to avoid exclusion of the basis of social class, ideology, age, occupational role and/or organizational affiliates.

The paradigm under discussion focused attention on education for life rather than education for scholarship. It was based on the interrelationship between the phases of psycho-social development and the social systems under which the change and growth take place. The social systems were: the family, the neighborhood, the city, the nation and the world. The phases of growth were: childhood replaces pre-school, youth replaced elementary school, young adult replaces secondary school and adult replaces higher education. Threaded throughout the paradigm was a concern with the physical and mental health of Black people and a positive association with their own cultural heritage.[9]

This paradigm was to provide the foundation on which education for Black humanism was to be based. The concept of "academic discipline" was to include these considerations as a sine qua non. Importantly, it was to provide the framework on which new and substantive bodies of knowledge about the Black condition were to be linked. It would require that such issues as self-concept, reparations, cooperative and collective economic enterprises, psychological and political liberation, and a re-ordering of values be systematically addressed and understood.

Many Black scholars have begun to address these questions from a variety of perspectives and as they would operate within a functional Black University. James Boggs has sketched out some

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guiding principles as they effect relationships (between student and community, research and community, theory and practice, intellectual studies and manual work, studies and social change, students and teachers and to one another) and subject matter (productive to technical skills, Black culture, social change) and interdisciplinary relationships.[11] As he views it, the educational process must re-structure Black-white relationship and internal relationships among Blacks as it operates.

IV. SCIENTIFIC COLONIALISM VS SCIENTIFIC HUMANISM

Any serious and studied review of the writings and productions of mainstream scholars will reveal three major short-comings. One is the tendency to define Black people as being in need of white accreditation before earning the right to be perceived as humans. The white supremacist policies which undergird such efforts are concealed behind a facade of scientific rationality. This tendency is observed as follows:

a) the pattern of comparing Black and White statistics without taking into account differences in opportunities emanating from the reality of white institutional racism.

b) the concealment of the exploitative nature of the relationships between social class grouping, Blacks and whites, and less chance communities and the larger systems in which they are embedded.

c) the labeling of the same behavior by whites and Blacks by the use of different sociological terms.

d) the tendency to treat Blacks as "equals" only as it relates to negative criteria such as crime statistics, drug addiction etc.

e) the tendency to view the problems of Blacks from the perspective of negative individual and group characteristics rather than perceiving such problems as being one consequence of their treatment within a white racist society.

Thinking Black scholars are aware of the fact that:

a) William Whyte's Organization Man should have been labeled the White Uncle Toms.

b) the only effective analogy between white and Black families has little to do with the role of the woman. It has more to do with the presumption of white male superiority and

actual Black male genocide. The fact of the matter is that white suburban families are matriarchial even though the man is in the home.

c) The residential patterns of this nation have less to do with land use, choice, and income than they do with discrimination, minority group exploitation and the over-protection of the vagina of white women by white men.

d) the ghetto cannot be understood as an orientation ground for becoming middle class. Its structure approximates that of a plantation or a prison system; controlled externally and internally by outsiders. The problems of the ghetto are white-generated, white-proliferated and white-controlled.

Flowing from this recognition should be an understanding of how the judgements of many scholars and those of their students have been systematically screwed up. Many of us cannot distinguish missionaries from mercenaries, clergymen from con men, nuns in habits from prostitutes in habits, teachers from wardens, students from inmates, policemen from the gestapo, criminals from philanthropists, and pimps from able parents. This phenomena has increased the possibility that the perceptions of the student will submit him to easy external control - and that he too, will be educated to use knowledge to manipulate rather than liberate.

This phenomena is further characterized by the rhetoric of oppression in the use of words to present the illusion of a democracy that does not exist.

Urban Renewal	really means	Negro Renewal
Model Cities	" "	Model Colonies
Human Relations	" "	Colonial Relations
Culturally Deprived	" "	Illegally Deprived
Public Welfare	" "	Public Starvation
Code Enforcement	" "	Tenant Exploitation
School De-Centralization	" "	School Re-Centralization

A third shortcoming is the failure to draw upon the natural shrewdness of the Black community in defining its own problems and aspiration. The current proliferation of autobiographies, biographies, novels, position statements and social studies produced by Blacks

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themselves are characterized by:

a) a lesser degree of intellectual fragmentation: such writings are marked by a discussion of the impact of white institutional racism, an awareness of the political realities and the interrelationship between separate concepts.

Iceberg's Slim's biography of Otis Tilson, a Black homosexual, describes male castration and homosexuality in one person as it has been seldom understood. Otis writes:

> ... my reason for telling my story is not money. I'm telling it for my poor dead Papa and myself and the thousands of Black men like him in ghetto torture chambers who have and will be niggerized and de-balled by the white structure and the thrill kill police.[12]

He further links the degradation of the Black man as it occurs both Down South and Up South:

> Papa had some importance and a sense of worth down South even though living conditions were subhuman. Up North, poor Papa would become a zero, unimportant to everyone even to his wife and children.[13]

b) The use of the subjects of study both as the sources and interpretors of the data. Not only has this provided a new source of data but a body of missing knowledge. For instance, very few libraries have a category "white institutional racism". Most libraries still view the race problem as the "Negro Problem", as "Discrimination", as "Racial and Cultural Minorities."[14]

V. HEADING HOME

It may appear that I have refused to confront and examine the subject issue: Black Studies as an Academic Discipline. It only appears that way. The crucial issue requires a re-definition of the concept such that Blacks are perceived as and treated as humans with a common heritage (African descendancy and victimization by white institutional racism). To discuss such an issue in the setting of white-controlled institution requires several prior actions. It is these prior actions to which this statement has been addressed:

a) the articulation and implementation of a new co-equal and parallel social contract - extending from admissions to governance.

b) the replacement of the philanthropic socio-economic contract between Blacks and whites with one which is based on the legal entitlements of Black restitution.

c) the development of the technology leading toward the establishment of a cooperative and collective socio-economic network of relationships among Blacks.

d) the replacement of scientific colonialism with scientific humanism.

e) the development of a systematic and transmittable body of knowledge about the Black condition.

Black Studies is an "academic discipline" fully accredited within the Black world. It is that body of experience and knowledge that Blacks have had to summon in order to learn how to survive within a society that is stacked against them. The white campus then, is a means to an end not an end in itself. It is a place to learn the man's language as a second language; to understand his institutions in order to subvert them; to hone one's mind to apply intelligence to an understanding and alleviation of the Black condition; to internalize a need to participate in one's own liberation; and to contribute to a sense of Black nationhood.

In the last analysis, this nation can not be a human nation until Black people and other minorities say and behave as though it is. In the same sense, any white institution which seeks to evaluate Black Studies Program on white oppressive criteria can never be a great institution until Black students so accredit it.

Right on -- Brothers and Sisters

Preston Wilcox, Chairman
National Association for
African American Education

Footnotes

1) Wilcox, Preston. The Black University: A Movement or An Institution. New York: National Association for African American Education, August 11, 1969. 11 pp. (mimeo).

2) Galtung, Johann, "The Lessons of Project Camelot: Scientific Colonialism", in Transition 30, 1967. pp. 11-15.

3) "Exerpts from Paper on which the 'Black Power' Philosophy is Based". in New York Times, August 5, 1966.
See also Carmichael, Stokley, "What We Want" in New York Review of Books, September 22, 1966. pp. 5-8.

4) For definitions of terms such as integration, desegration, humanization, Black-controlled Schools Movement, Segregation, and Separation, see Wilcox, Preston. Integration or Separation in Education: K 12. New York: Afram Associates, Inc., July 3, 1969. 14 pp.

5) Forman, James. "Total Control as the only Solution to the Economic Problems", in Renewal, 9:6, June, 1969. pp. 9-13.

6) Boggs, James. The Myth and Irrationality of Black Capitalism. New York: Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, April 28, 1969. (mimeo).

7) Forman, op. cit. p. 10.

8) Report of the NOPC: St. Louis. New York: National Association for African American Education, September 23, 1968. p. 31.

9) Montgomery, M. Lee. Draft: Black Humanity. New York: National Association for African American Education, June, 1969.

10) Wilcox, Preston. The Black University: A Bibliography. New York: Afram Associates, Inc. July 12, 1969. 8 pp. and Sources of Publications. (mimeo).

11) Boggs, James. Curriculum Studies for Black Studies Institutes. New York: National Association for African American Education, February 12, 1969. 3 pp.

12) Iceberg Slim (Beck, Robert). Mama Black Widow. Los Angeles, Calif: Holloway House Publishing Co., 1969. p. 6.

13) Ibid. p. 55.

14) Havrilesky, Catherine and Wilcox, Preston. A Selected Bibliography on White Institutional Racism. New York: Afram Associates, Inc., July 1, 1969. p. 3.

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